

Information for public health and school-based H1N1 clinics can be found at flu.masspro.org , or by telephone at 866-627-7968. If there are no clinics scheduled in your area and you would like to get on a list to receive the vaccine, call your health care provider.

With the President's recent declaration of a state of emergency, I wanted to provide you with the most up to date information from the CDC on H1N1, or swine flu, and where you can get vaccinated.

What is it? H1N1, often referred to as swine flu, is a new influenza virus causing illness in people. The virus was first detected in the United States in April, 2009.

How does it spread? The H1N1 virus is thought to be spread in the same way as seasonal flu, either from person to person through coughing or sneezing, or by touching an object or a surface with flu viruses on it and then touching your mouth or nose.

What are the symptoms? Symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea.

What about vaccination? Currently, the two types of vaccines being produced are a shot and a nasal spray. The federal government has purchased 250 million doses of the vaccine, which should be enough for anyone who chooses to be vaccinated. The early release of the H1N1 vaccine is recommended for individuals who are at the highest risk for contracting swine flu.

Who is at the highest risk for contracting? Who should consider getting vaccinated? The CDC lists the following 5 groups of individuals who should consider getting vaccinated:

- Pregnant women
- People who live with or provide care for infants younger than 6 months (e.g., parents, siblings, and day care providers)
- Health care and emergency medical services personnel
- People 6 months through 24 years of age

- People 25 years through 64 years of age who have certain medical conditions that put them at a higher risk for influenza-related complications.

What about senior citizens? It is not recommended that people over the age of 65 receive the first available doses of the vaccine, because they are the least likely people to contract the illness. Senior citizens will certainly have the opportunity to get vaccinated, but only after the high risk groups get the vaccine.

How can I get vaccinated? Where do I go? Due to the shortage of the vaccine in relation to public demand, the vaccine will be released simply as it comes off the production line. The CDC also has information on their website, at www.cdc.gov/H1N1flu

. You can also find more information about H1N1 and flu shot locations at flu.gov. The information number for the CDC is 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636).